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Reviews.

MACLISE'S SACRIFICE OF NOAH.

It is not often that we have an opportunity to see so characteristic a specimen of an European master as the Sacrifice of Noah, now exhibiting at the gallery of Messrs. Goupil & Co., and not often will the American connoisseur be provoked to so great wonder as to the requisites for an English celebrity in Art.

To suppose that Mr. Maclise has attained the position he holds among English artists without some kind of talent in a great degree, would be impeaching too directly the taste of our mother land; but it certainly is no compliment to it, to admit that he is considered a master, on no better grounds than this picture offers, and we believe it is admitted to be one of his best. That it exhibits a certain power, is true, a power of the hand, and perhaps a certain force of conception, which, taken together, make a forcible and remarkable picture, but at which we look in vain for any motive of genuine thought or feeling.

We must look for the motive of a work of Art, either to the ideal or the actual, and it is not difficult generally to determine which is the governing element, but oftentimes where neither is really developed, the imaginations of an artist's admirers supply both as they may be desired. So to the realist Maclise may be real, and to one who ambitiously prates of the ideal, he departs widely enough from the actual to be suspected of any amount of ideal tendency. But of consistent idealism we cannot charge this picture; and it seems to us, indeed, to lack entirely a central idea. It is evidently not ideal in expression, since the faces are merely those of models, and expressionless; the joy, the gratitude, and even the reverence of the occasion, are wanting—not in the philosophical sense, for the characters are not even typical. We cannot even give the artist credit for the grandeur of composition clearly aimed at, for the arrangement is artificial in the extreme, and the action theatrical—the positions are the *posés* of hired models.

But if it is to the real that we must look for the excellence of the picture, we are met again by the evidence, that the artist did not even accept the dignity of the actual. There is much excellent still-life and drapery-painting in the picture, but unity is wanting everywhere, and even consistency and common-sense, in many points. A single instance will perhaps characterize the whole. In the pile of objects in the foreground is some gold and silver plate, of elaborate workmanship and classic patterns! The large silver vase has an unaccountable white reflection—there being no object which could produce it. The solution of the problem of its presence is evidently this: the artist studied the vase placed on a white table-cloth, and copied it exactly, forgetting entirely that he was to have no white cloth in his picture; and if further testimony is required, note that he has painted also the reflections of two lemons on the vase, which probably lay on the table, while the fruits in the picture, which should have been reflected, are an orange and an apple, or pomegranate, it is hard to say which. An instant's thought

would have remedied this—a serious thought would have thrown out both plate and fruit, supplying their places with the rude wooden dish, the loaves and figs which Vernet's common-sense introduced into his Brethren of Joseph. Again, one of the sons, with a convulsive action, extends his arm, apparently for the sake of displaying a well-painted bracelet on it—an excellent example of the work of the ante diluvian jewelry.

This seems to us the spirit in which the picture has been painted, an ostentation, first, of rich material, and next, of the artist's dexterity—of externals entirely. It is difficult to say much that is complimentary of a work executed in this spirit, and we were never so much at a loss to find subject for praise. The drawing, even, is not good, for the principal figure, that of Noah, is most unaccountably deformed in the left arm and shoulder, and bad passages of drawing are discoverable all through the picture; the color is either hard and opaque, or morbid and exaggerated to violence, as in the draperies of the group of women at the left, and generally it is inharmonious.

The most that we can make of the picture is, that it is a clever collection of studies of individual things put together without worthier motive than to make a picture, its force and cleverness being its chief attraction. But, power in any shape, we have long since learned, is worthy only with reference to the end for which it is used; and so, even admitting that the composition, &c., are good, there remains no other conclusion than that there is a great deal of cleverness and study wasted on a mere superficiality—that it is like a clever sermon having no moral, or an oration of fine sounding words, rhetorically arranged, but destitute of the thought essential to eloquence—and even the good things in it become bad, mainly, from being the ministers to a spirit of vanity and ostentation, like men laboring honestly in a dishonest cause.

BENJAMIN WEST.—His talents were of a realistic tendency, and he may in some measure be looked upon as the founder of that mode of representing coeval history, of which Horace Vernet's works, in our days, are such brilliant examples. His "Death of General Wolfe" is a notable instance. To the right conception, however, of Scriptural events, as the highest sphere of Art, he never attained, and to this class belong his two chief pictures here (Marlborough House) of "The Last Supper," and "Christ Healing the Sick." The more we require in the representation of such sublime subjects, the more unsatisfactory, and even offensive, is the impression made by these pictures. The general and insignificant character of the heads, displays a lamentable deficiency in knowledge of Nature; the expression is affected or poor—the attitudes theatrical or unmeaning—the tone of the flesh brick-red and cold—the colors heavy and opaque—the total impression motley and scattered; and yet these pictures are considered by many Englishmen as true models of sacred painting; and I have often found a great number of admiring spectators collected round them. Considering the religious respect for the Bible so general in England, I believed at first that this admiration was paid to the subject rather than to the manner in which it was treated. But having since seen, in the apartment at Hampton Court, where Raphael's seven cartoons are

hung, which also represent subjects from Scripture, and that in the most worthy and dignified manner, that persons of the same class spend no more time than was necessary to walk through it, I am convinced that, even in the great mass of what are called the educated classes in England, there is not yet any genuine feeling for the true style of historical painting.—*Dr. Waagen.*

APSEY HOUSE.—On entering the vestibule, my eye was attracted by a bronze copy of the monument to Blücher at Breslau, executed by my friend Rauch, and here placed on a pedestal of porphyry. His excellent bust of the Emperor Nicholas was also here. Busts of the late Duke are in this room as well, one of them by Nollikens, but none convey to me the penetration, elevation, and, at the same time, humor, which mark his features. A few steps further took me into the hall, where stands Canova's colossal marble statue of the great adversary of Wellington and Blücher. Never before were the vicissitudes of earthly greatness and splendor placed so strikingly before my eyes. Whatever may be the opinions entertained of Napoleon's character—and a German cannot be suspected of bearing him any affection—the sight of this statue filled me for a while with melancholy thoughts. Here was the man who had raised himself from obscurity to a pinnacle of power, of which history gives no parallel; who had changed the face of the world, and subdued the whole continent with his arm; here was he in his proudest image, crowned with laurel, and holding victory in one hand and the sceptre of dominion in the other, displaying these trophies beneath his conqueror's roof, and that in so confined a space that there is not room enough even to view the statue! Considered as a work of Art, the forms are too clumsy and heavy, the head too small in proportion, and not of such resemblance as the statue by Chaudet, which, as a companion to Julius Cæsar, adorns our Berlin Museum.—*Dr. Waagen.*

GAINSBOROUGH'S "BLUE BOY."—This picture owed its origin to a dispute between Gainsborough and other artists. Gainsborough's object was practically to disprove the opinion of Sir Joshua, who maintained that the predominance of blue in a picture was incompatible with good coloring. In spite of the blue dress, he has succeeded in producing an harmonious and pleasing effect. It cannot be doubted that in the cool scale of colors, in which blue acts the chief part, there are very tender and pleasing harmonies, which Sir Joshua, with his way of seeing, could not well appreciate. On the whole, too, he may be so far right, that painters would certainly do well to avoid as much as possible the use of pure unbroken blue in large masses. The Blue Boy is, besides, remarkable for animation and spirit, and careful solid painting.—*Dr. Waagen.*

SONNET ON REMBRANDT.

BY WASHINGTON ALLSTON.

As in that twilight, superstitious age,
When all beyond the narrow grasp of mind
Seemed fraught with meanings of supernal kind,
When e'en the learned philosophic sage,
Went with the stars thro' boundless space to range,
Listened with reverence to the changeling's tale;
E'en so, thou strangest of all beings strange!
E'en so thy visionary scenes I hail;
That like the rambling of an idiot's speech,
No image giving of a thing on earth,
Nor thought significant in Reason's reach,
Yet in their random shadowings give birth
To thoughts and things from other worlds that come,
And fill the soul, and strike the reason dumb.